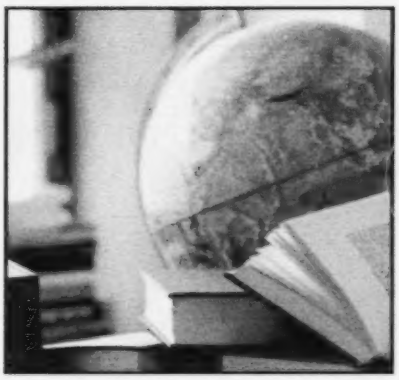
Catalogue no. 81-599-X – No. 11
ISSN 1709-8653
ISBN 978-0-660-06314-0

Education Indicators in Canada: Fact Sheet

International students in Canadian Universities, 2004/2005 to 2013/2014



Release date: October 20, 2016

Statistics Canada Statistique Canada

Canada

cmec
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada)

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, www.statcan.gc.ca.

You can also contact us by

email at STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca

telephone, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following toll-free numbers:

- Statistical Information Service 1-800-263-1136
- National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired 1-800-363-7629
- Fax line 1-877-287-4369

Depository Services Program

- Inquiries line 1-800-635-7943
- Fax line 1-800-565-7757

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on www.statcan.gc.ca under "Contact us" > "Standards of service to the public."

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Standard table symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

. not available for any reference period
.. not available for a specific reference period
... not applicable
0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p} preliminary
^{r} revised
x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E} use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© Minister of Industry, 2016

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada Open Licence Agreement.

An HTML version **is also available.**

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Education Indicators in Canada: Fact Sheet

October 2016

International students in Canadian Universities, 2004/2005 to 2013/2014[1]

Introduction

Countries compete in order to attract international students for a number of reasons. From a broader social perspective, "international students strengthen Canada's schools, universities, and colleges, as well as the Canadian communities in which they study and live, and they contribute to the quality of the educational experiences of all students in Canada."[2] Provincial education ministries of higher education also seek out international students for the diversity that international students bring to postsecondary campuses. For example, the British Columbia International Education Strategy notes that this diversity "helps make B.C. more globally minded and builds better international connections"[3].

From an economic perspective, the arrival of international students on Canadian campuses can represent a flow of highly skilled talent that can help ease domestic skills shortages not filled by the native-born population[4]. A recent study notes that of the cohort of international students who came to Canada to study during the 1990s and early 2000s, 20% to 27% obtained permanent resident status in the 10 years after receiving their first study permit[5]. Thus, a substantial proportion of these students come to study, but eventually choose to make Canada their home. Finally, international students provide an additional source of revenue for postsecondary institutions, notably from higher international tuition rates.

The most recent available data show that international students comprise a growing proportion of the Canadian university student population accounting for eleven percent of students at Canadian universities in 2013-2014, up from seven percent in 2004-2005. Between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, the total number of international students enrolled in Canadian universities almost doubled, from 66,000 to 124,000 students (see Chart 1). To put this growth in perspective, the international student population at Canadian universities grew 88% between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, while the comparable growth rate for Canadian students was 22%.

This fact sheet provides a portrait of international students in Canadian universities between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, where they were studying in Canada, where they came from and in what fields they were studying.

1 Enrolments are based on students enrolled in the postsecondary institutions at the time of the fall snapshot date, that is, a single date chosen by the institution which falls from September 30th to December 1st of the reference year. Therefore students who are not enrolled during this time period are excluded and enrolment totals do not represent a full academic year. For more information please see the Postsecondary Student Information System Integrated Meta Database webpage.

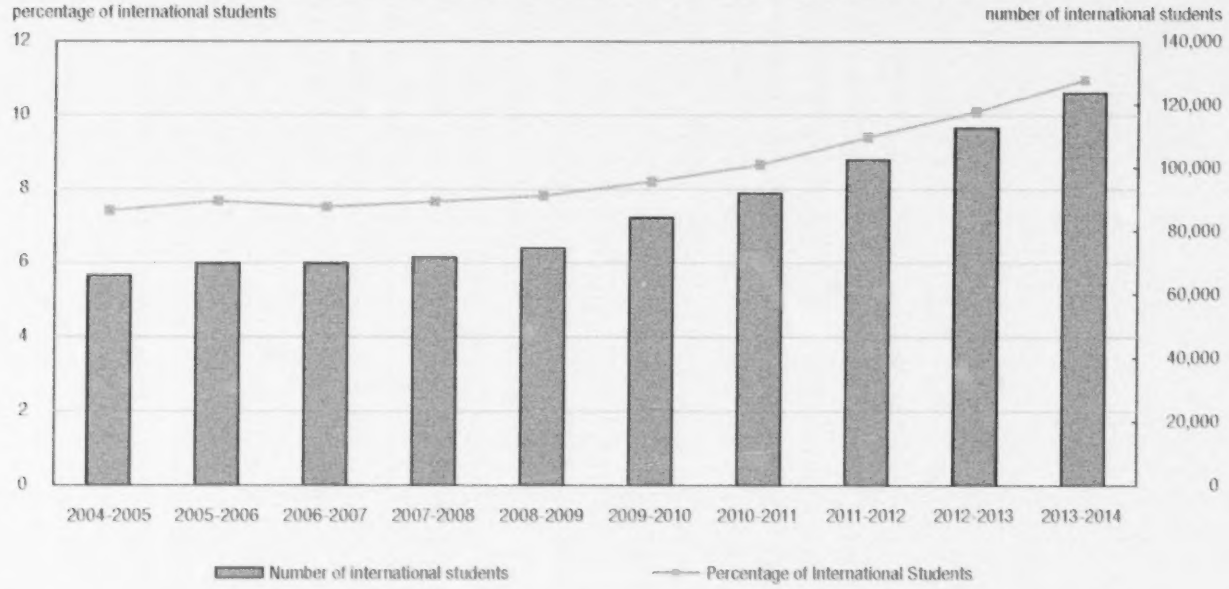
2 Council of the Ministers of Education, Canada. 2011. "Bringing Education in Canada to the World, Bringing the World to Canada: An International Education Marketing Action Plan for Provinces and Territories." Online publication of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

3 Ministry of Advanced Education, British Columbia. 2012. "British Columbia's International Education Strategy." Online publication of the Ministry of Advanced Education, British Columbia. Online publication of the Ministry of Advanced Education, British Columbia.

4 *International students: Brains without borders*. The Economist. January 30, 2016. http://www.economist.com/node/21689540/print

5 Lu, Yuqian and Feng Hou. 2015. "International students who become permanent residents in Canada". *Insights on Canadian Society*. December. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X.

Chart 1
Number and percentage of international students in all university programs, Canada, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014



Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System (PSIS), 2004-2005 to 2013-2014.

Definitions

International students are defined as those who left their country of origin and moved to Canada for the purpose of study. In Canada, the concept of "international students" includes non-permanent residents, such as those with a study permit. It also includes those enrolled in a Canadian program from a Canadian institution that is not located in Canada (also known as "offshore students") as well as non-Canadian students studying via the Internet.

The population studied in this report includes students enrolled in Canadian universities in Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral programs or their equivalents (ISCED levels 6, 7, and 8). While other kinds of programs are also delivered at universities, they are not part of this analysis.

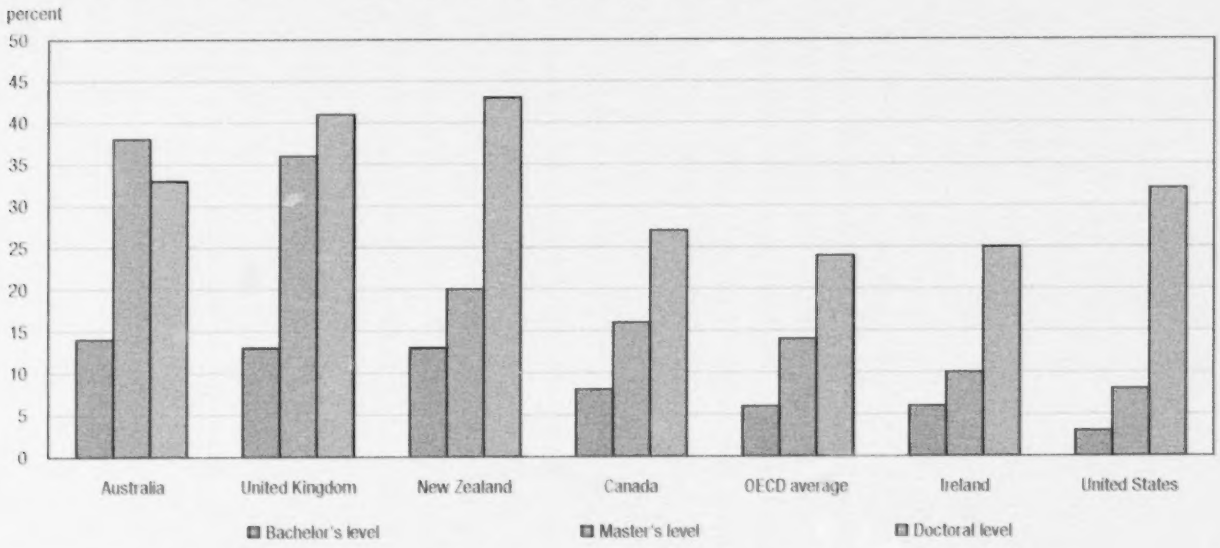
Canada in comparison with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries

Relative to other countries, in the 2012-2013[6] school year Canada ranked slightly higher than the OECD average for international students as a proportion of all students for all three levels of study (see Chart 2). In relation to other primarily English speaking countries, Canada has hosted a lower proportion of international students than Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, but a higher one than Ireland and the United States.

In all of the countries shown in Chart 2, international students made up a progressively increasing percentage of all enrolments from Bachelor's to Master's to Doctoral levels, except for Australia, where the percentage of international Master's students exceeded that for Doctoral students.

6 This is the most recent year available for international comparison from: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2015. *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*. Note that in EAG the year 2012-2013 is referenced as 2013.

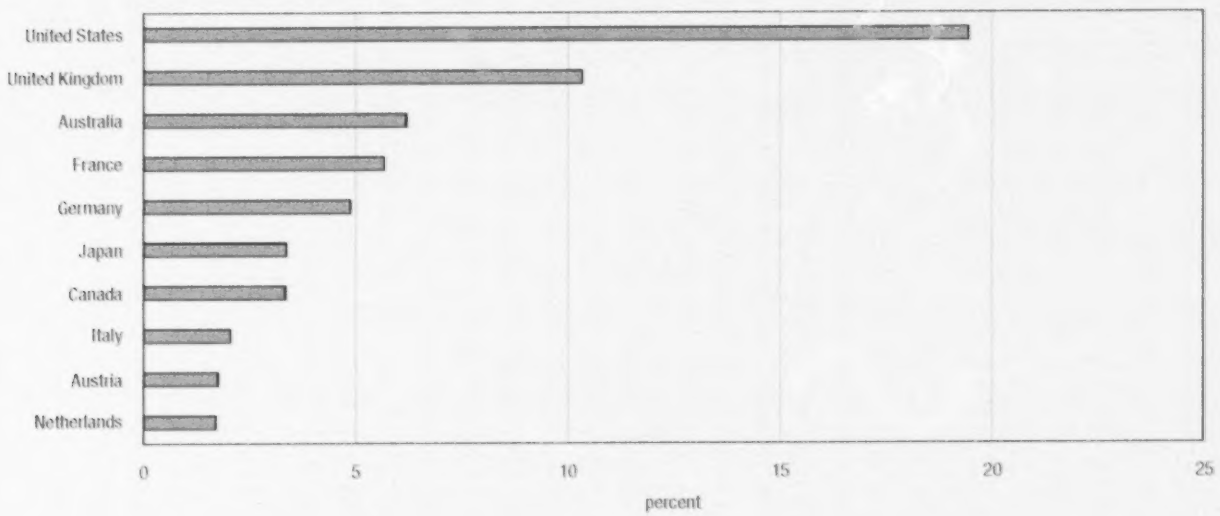
Chart 2
Proportion of international students, by program level, selected OECD countries, 2012-2013



Note: In order to show the same reference year (2012-2013), values for Canada come directly from the Postsecondary Student Information System.
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators* and Statistics Canada, Postsecondary Student Information System, 2012-2013.

Another way to compare Canada to other OECD countries in terms of hosting international students is to look at Canada's share of all international students from OECD and partner G20 source countries (see Chart 3). By this measure, Canada received a share that tied with Japan for sixth place (3.4%). The top three places went to other primarily English speaking countries, with the United States being first (19.4%), United Kingdom second (10.3%), and Australia third (6.2%). France ranked fourth, receiving 5.7% of all international students.

Chart 3
Top 10 OECD destination countries by percent of all international students from OECD and other G20 partner source countries enrolled in tertiary programs, 2013



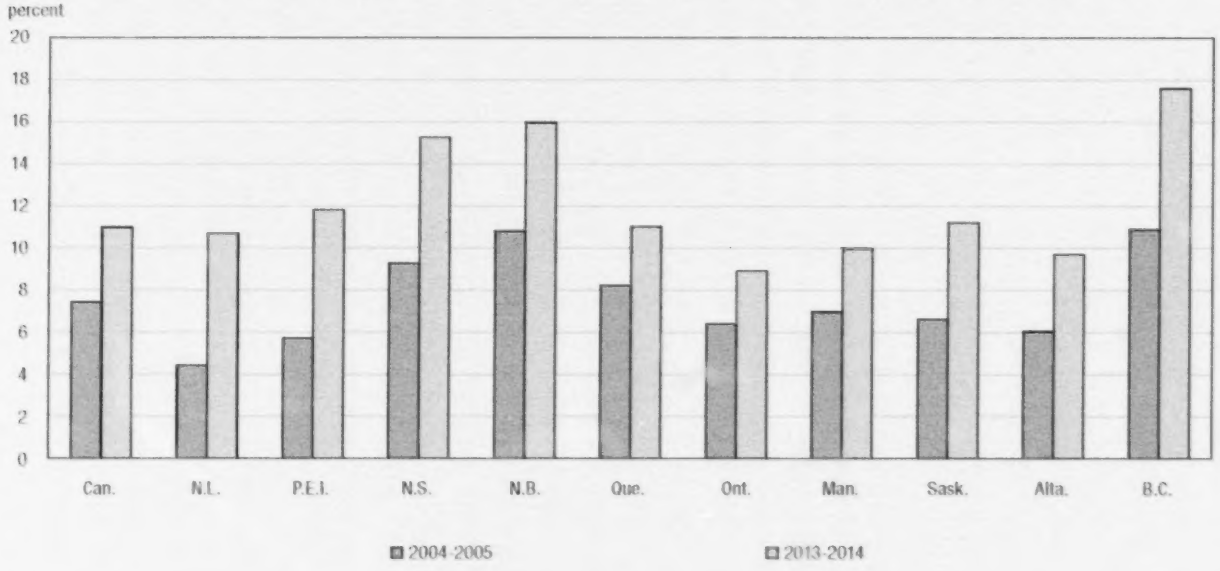
Note: Canadian data is from 2011-2012.
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*.

International students by province

The proportion of international students on university campuses has increased in all provinces over the past decade (see Chart 4). The largest change in proportions between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014 took place in British Columbia (+6.7), the Atlantic provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick) with increases of between 5.2 to 6.3 percentage points and Saskatchewan (+4.6).

In 2013-2014, Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba had the lowest proportions of international students, at 8.9%, 9.7%, and 10.0% respectively. By contrast, British Columbia, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had the highest proportions of international students, with 17.6%, 16.0% and 15.3% respectively.

Chart 4
International students as a percentage of all university enrolments, provinces and Canada, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014



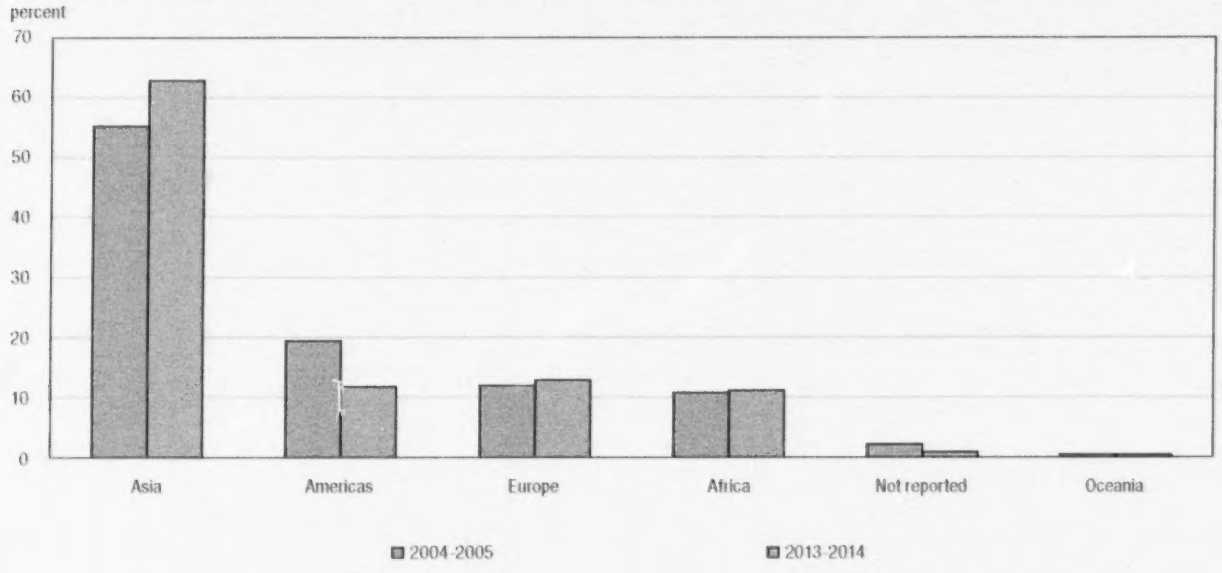
Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014.

Source regions for international students

Asia was the main source region for all international students in the OECD in 2012-2013[7] (53%). This was also the case in Canada in 2013-2014, with Asia's share growing to almost 63% of university international students in 2013, up from 55% in 2004 (see Chart 5). Between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, while the proportions of international students from Europe, Africa, Oceania, and other regions did not change much, those from the Americas showed a decrease of 7.6 percentage points.

7 Most recent year available, OECD 2015.

Chart 5
Percentage of international university students from various source regions, Canada, 2004-2005 and 2013-2014



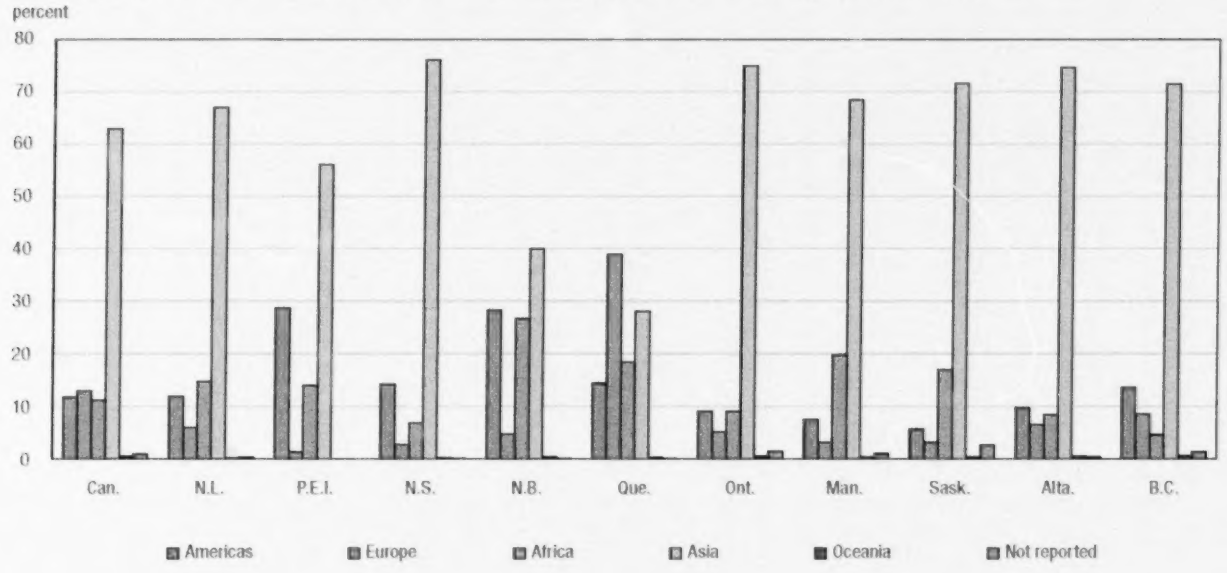
Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014.

In 2013-2014, Asia was the largest source region of international students for most provinces (40% to 76% of all international students; See Chart 6). The exception was in Quebec where Europe was the largest source region at 39% (the main source country being France).

With respect to individual source countries for Canada in 2013-2014, the top five were China (34.1%), France (7.6%), the United States (6.2%), India (5.7%), and Saudi Arabia (4.5%). China was the main source country for all provinces in 2013-2014, except for Quebec (France at 34.0%), and New Brunswick (Trinidad and Tobago, at 20.4%)[8].

8 The University of New Brunswick has a partnership with the University of West Indies at St. Augustine and offers courses leading to a UNB Fredericton Bachelor of Business Administration in Trinidad and Tobago.

Chart 6
Percentage of international university students from various source regions, provinces and Canada, 2013-2014

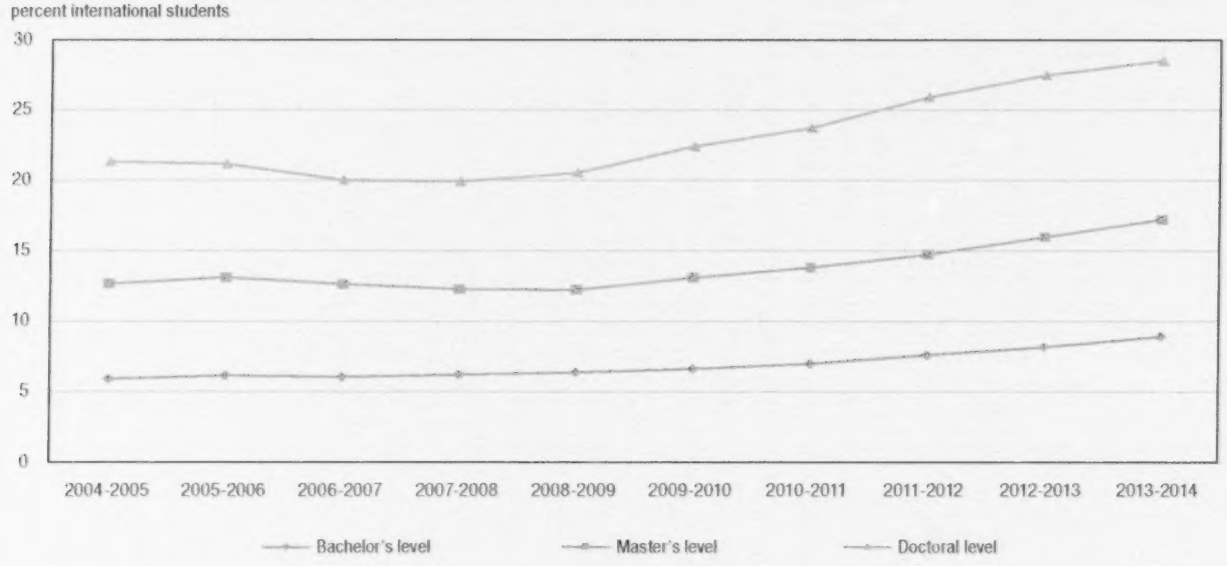


Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2013-2014.

International students by level of program

Since 2004-2005, graduate programs have had a higher percentage of international students, with doctoral level programs (Postsecondary 3rd cycle) having a higher percentage than master's level programs (Postsecondary 2nd cycle). While the increase in the proportion of international students at the undergraduate level was steady between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, the proportion at the doctoral and master's levels have showed a small decrease followed by a return to an increase during that same time period. (see Chart 7).

Chart 7
International students as a percentage of all university enrolments by program level (Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral), Canada, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014



Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014.

At each program level, the top 10 source countries in 2013-2014 represented a large portion of international students, almost three quarters at Bachelor's and Master's levels and close to two thirds at the Doctoral level (see Table 1). Several countries are in the top ten for all levels (China, France, United States, Saudi Arabia and India), and they contribute a large share of the international students at these levels. However, some other countries are only associated with one or two levels, and do not account for as large a number of students. For example, Iran is not in the top 10 source countries for the Bachelor's level, but is sixth (4.7%) at the Master's level, and second (15.1%) at the Doctoral level.

Table 1
Top 10 source countries for international university students by level of study, and percent of international students from that country, PSIS, 2013

	Bachelor's level		Master's level		Doctoral level	
Rank	Country	%	Country	%	Country	%
1	China	40.0	China	25.5	China	16.4
2	France	6.9	India	13.1	Iran	15.1
3	United States	5.6	France	9.5	United States	9.4
4	Saudi Arabia	4.3	United States	5.9	France	8.1
5	Nigeria	3.6	Saudi Arabia	5.8	India	5.4
6	India	3.4	Iran	4.7	Saudi Arabia	2.9
7	Republic of Korea	3.4	Bangladesh	2.4	Egypt	2.2
8	Pakistan	1.9	Pakistan	2.3	Germany	2.1
9	Hong Kong	1.7	Nigeria	2.0	Mexico	1.9
10	Malaysia	1.2	Tunisia	1.4	Bangladesh	1.6

Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2013-2014.

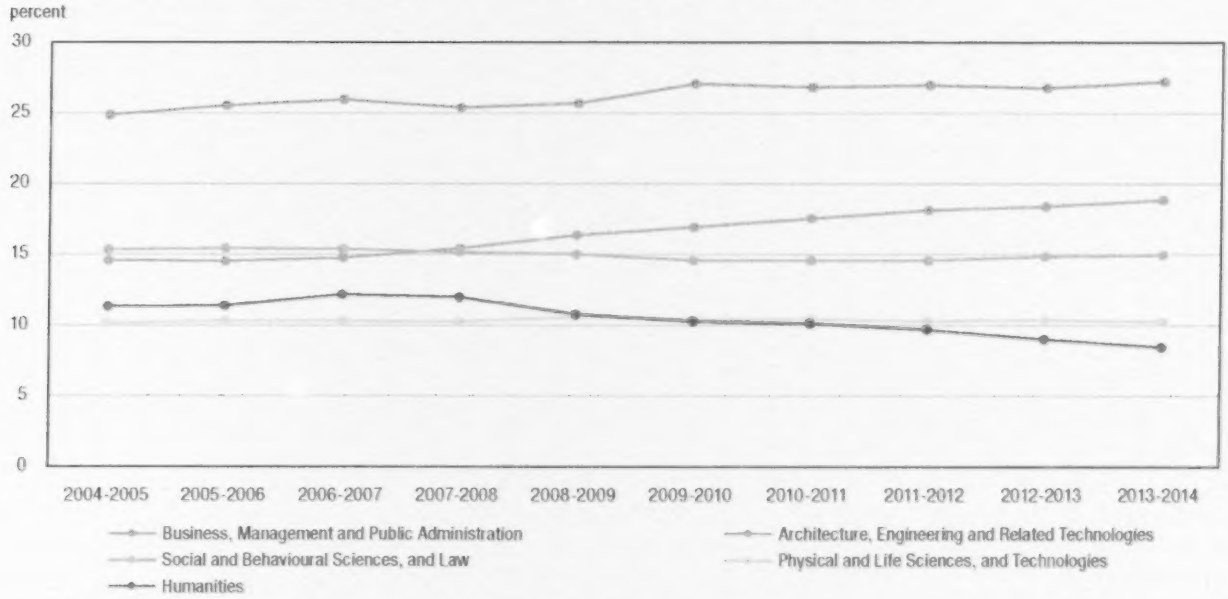
International students' fields of study

International students were fairly concentrated in their top two fields of study with almost half of these students taking *Business, Management and Public Administration* (27%) and *Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies* (19%). Notably, this concentration was not as marked for Canadian students - 17% of Canadian students were in *Business, Management and Public Administration* and 9% were in *Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies*. The other fields of study in the top five for international students were *Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Law* (15%), *Physical and Life Sciences, and Technologies* (10%) and *Humanities* (8%).

Between 2004-2005 and 2013-2014, the top five subjects have remained the most popular, with *Business, Management and Public Administration* at the top, and *Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies* increasing the most (from 15% to 19%).

The most popular program for international students at the Bachelor's level was *Business, Management and Public Administration* (33%), while for both Master's and Doctoral levels it was *Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies* (27% and 30%, respectively – mostly in engineering).

Chart 8
Top five fields of study for international university students, Canada, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014

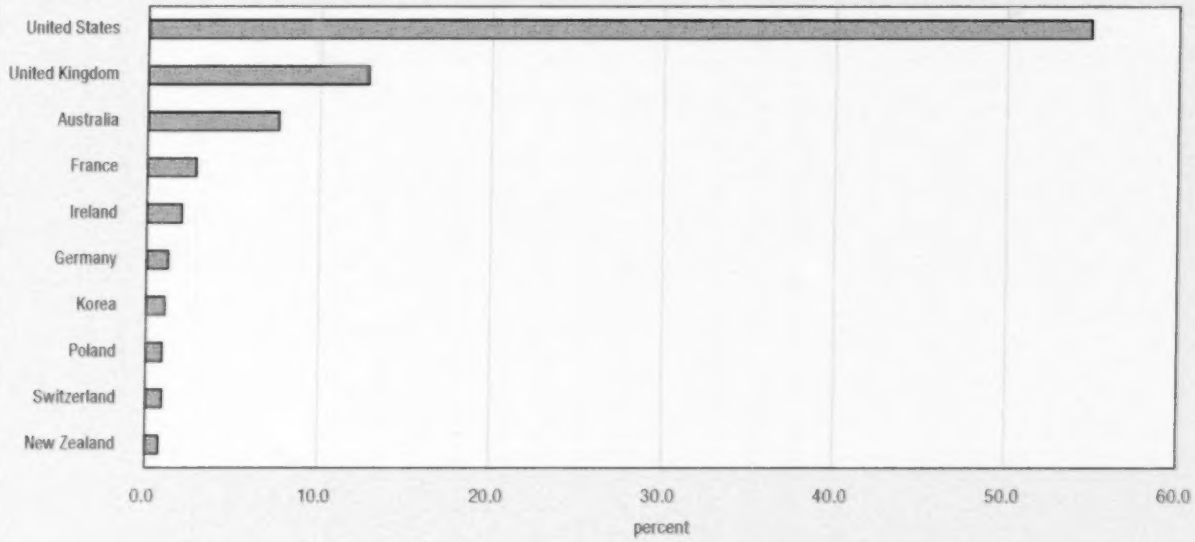


Source: Statistics Canada, Post-secondary Student Information System, 2004-2005 to 2013-2014.

Canadian residents studying abroad

As of 2012-2013, there were about 47,690 Canadian university students studying abroad. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the top destination countries for Canadian university students studying abroad (see Chart 10) included the United States (54.9%), the United Kingdom (12.9%), Australia (7.6%), and France (2.8%).

Chart 9
Percentage at top 10 destination countries for Canadian students studying abroad (tertiary level), 2012-2013



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*.

Conclusion

Canadian institutions and different levels of government within Canada strategize in order to attract international students and compete with other countries in this respect. In recent years, these strategies have brought some success with the proportion of international students on Canadian university campuses increasing from 7% of all students in 2004-2005 to 11% in 2013-2014. However, it should be noted that world-wide, the number of international students is rising in general, with the OECD stating that this is because of an "increase in global demand for tertiary education, reduced transportation and communication costs, and the internationalisation of labour markets for highly skilled people"[9].

In terms of success relative to other predominantly English-speaking countries, Canada's proportion of international students is lower than most of these countries, with the exception of the United States and Ireland. It is difficult to compare countries' situations however, as the contexts are quite different. For example, in the United Kingdom, which has a substantially higher proportion of international students than Canada at the tertiary level, there are fewer barriers for students from other countries in Europe to study in the United Kingdom and a close geographical proximity to the rest of Europe. In contrast, the United States has a relatively low proportion of international students at the tertiary level, but hosts the largest number of international students. Australia with a similar population size and situation in terms of geographic isolation, has a much higher proportion of international students at the undergraduate level – 14% to Canada's 8%. Australia also receives a larger share of international students from the OECD and other OECD G20 countries – 6% versus 3% in Canada.

9 OECD, 2015.

In Canada, the presence of international students is felt most strongly at the doctoral level, accounting for 29% of these students in Canada. This compares to 9% at the bachelor's level and 17% at the master's level. Nevertheless, due to the sheer size of the bachelor's programs, most of Canada's international students study at the bachelor's level. Perhaps one of the most notable characteristics of international students in Canada is that almost half of international students were concentrated in business and engineering - two career-focused fields of study. This concentration was more marked for international students than for their Canadian counterparts.

Comparative issues aside, international students are a growing presence on Canadian university campuses, a reflection of their importance to these institutions and to Canadian society.